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How to cite:

Watson, Nicola (2011). Fandom mapped: Rousseau, Scott and Byron on the itinerary of Lady Frances Shelley. Romantic Circles Praxis Series: Romantic Fandom, article no. , article 2.

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Version: Version of Record

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Romantic Fandom

"Fandom mapped: Rousseau, Scott and Byron on the Itinerary of Lady Frances Shelley"

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1. As Eric Eisner has remarked, the Romantic period saw an unprecedented explosion of what we would now recognise as "fan practices": "admirers collected autographs, souvenirs, portraits, and relics of celebrity writers, artists, performers, military heroes, and athletes;" "visited the homes and haunts of celebrities;" imitated celebrities, and fantasised about becoming their intimates; wrote fan mail, and formed communities of like-minded devotees ("Introduction"). Taken together, these practices arguably mark the beginning of what would become a mass-cultural phenomenon over the later nineteenth century. This essay therefore addresses itself to a series of questions which transfer some of the preoccupations of recent scholarship on contemporary fandom back to the moment of its inception. [1] Specifically, what different modes of demonstrating appreciation were precipitated around literary figures between the 1770s and the 1830s? How might the concept of "fandom" help us to make sense of one enduring material reading practice that became newly prominent at this time—namely, the practice of visiting places associated with authors and their works in order to re-read texts *in situ*? And how might attending to that practice of fandom illuminate further the development of a new reading culture in the period?

2. To attend to the fan rather than the celebrity (although, as I'll be discussing below, the two are sometimes one and the same person) is a relatively novel departure for romantic scholarship. Understandably, perhaps, romantic scholarship has found it much more attractive to identify or ally itself with two variant forms of romantic authorial celebrity, the neglected genius, associated especially with Keats, and the sexy superstar, embodied by Byron. As an academic, it is particularly seductive to ally oneself with the figure of the neglected genius writing for posterity, a figure which, as Andrew Bennett has noted, is the default setting for romantic poetics; after all, many of us are neglected geniuses ourselves, teaching a rather unenthusiastic posterity. The persistent interest in romantic authors' self-depiction as suffering constitutively or playfully from an anxiety of authorship is another variant of this critical tendency. [2] Alternatively, in the climate of today's celebrity culture, it has become possible to rediscover Byron as a necessary precondition for Mick Jagger, as the first famous poet to inspire certain modes of feeling on an international scale. [3] Tellingly, even the scholarship on Byron's celebrity has displayed a marked tendency to twist away from the fact of his huge fame to concentrate instead upon the ways in which

(allegedly) Byron never fully or willingly occupied it, preferring to ironise his massively popular public persona in a suitably “romantic” and, let it be whispered, attractively elitist and aristocratic fashion (see Christensen; Bennett). The scholarship on Byron’s celebrity additionally typically, if inexplicitly, describes the madness that endeavouring either to master or emulate Byron might threaten; how much safer and more respectable to be his Hobhouse than to be just another one amongst his many unhappy shadowers, amongst them Caroline Lamb, Claire Clairmont, John Clare, and Samuel Egerton Brydges. [4] (The alternative available role, to construct oneself as an efficient and commercial sponger off the noble Lord in the manner of a Harriette Wilson, Leigh Hunt or a John Murray, is probably nearer the mark for the modern critic, but possibly represents an even more unwelcome and unromantic construction of the academic enterprise.) Such writing on Byron has only partially acknowledged that there is no such thing as the celebrity without the fan; as Eisner notes, literary celebrity “is not simply one form of authorship, but rather...a form of the relationship between writers and readers” (Eisner 3). If and when the fan *is* acknowledged, he or she often appears as a flattering avatar for the scholar, a special, tormented, and intimate soul (Soderholm). In short, the fan is an embarrassment, and the fan in the academic even more so. Supposedly naïve, obsessive, desirous, and dangerously predatory, the fan has arguably hitherto been the abjected of the history of romantic culture and of romantic criticism itself, both in criticism written during the period and that produced since.

3. My focus in this essay, however, is on the case-history of a romantic fan who was neither naïve, obsessive, desirous, nor predatory (shortcomings which, may, of course, disqualify her from the status of fan in some eyes). Charming, lively, beautiful, humorous, well-read yet unintellectual, and a crashing snob, Lady Frances Shelley counted amongst the amusements of her life the pleasures of literary fandom. Her diary and letters, unpublished until the early twentieth century, supply a first-hand description of multiple instances of a particular mode of reading that emerged in the period—the idea of reading authors in and against places associated with them, combining literary connoisseurship with dilettante travel. Her accounts of this practice exemplify what a variety of site-specific modes of appreciating the literary the romantics developed, and they also suggest some of the disparate and unevenly operating factors that underlay them. My discussion therefore follows in her well-shod footsteps across England, Scotland, Germany, Switzerland and Italy over the years between 1815 and 1854, considering not only what she does say and do as a literary tourist, but what she doesn’t choose to do, for both are equally telling.

4. I have chosen to concentrate on Lady Shelley as a central consciousness largely for her conventionality and typicality, something for which I imagine she would not have thanked me. Unhampered by literary ambition and anxiety, she was not weighed down by the need to produce competitively fine writing for a public beyond her own immediate circle; she was cheerfully unobsessed by any of the literary lions she met or pursued; and she was markedly mobile in her ability to occupy a variety of possible tourist stances and fan pleasures. Reviewing her diary and letters on their publication in 1912, the *New York Times* took the view that she was not romantic or enthusiastic enough, remarking that “mostly the

impressions are too matter-of-factly recorded, and lead one to conclude that Lady Shelley generally recorded inferences which others around her had expressed"; the writer was especially cutting about her account of her visit to Rousseau's house on the Île St Pierre—"matter of fact and almost schoolgirlish." These strictures usefully identify her as disappointingly commonplace in her sentiments and commentary. [5] As such, she serves here as a conveniently representative case-study in romantic literary fandom of the fairly casual and thoroughly ordinary sort, always bearing in mind the proviso that, as I'll be noting below, her stances and destinations are determined both by her class status as an aristocrat and by her gender.

5. To attend to Shelley's literary pleasures is to discover something of how romantic readers produced new constructions of themselves in relation to the emergent romantic author. Recent scholarship has been interested not only in the emergence of new models of authorship but in how this was produced in response to a new literary marketplace, a reading-boom, defined by a vastly expanded literacy and mass print-production. Although, following from Robert Darnton's pioneering work, there have been a number of recent influential studies of romantic readership and romantic reading practices, most notably by scholars such as William St Clair and H.J. Jackson, scholarship has only just begun systematically to investigate how individual romantic readers constructed themselves as such in relation to the romantic author. [6] I have argued elsewhere that literary tourism developed in response to a variety of stimuli—the need to model the romantic self, for example, to which both Rousseau and Byron were so important; the desire to verify a national landscape mapped within a newly national literature; the desire to assert a fictional intimacy and kinship between the author and reader which bridged the alienation of print culture. But here I want to concentrate on the relation between the development of literary tourism and the development of the romantic reader. Shelley's account of herself as a reader-tourist revealingly suggests that romantic readers strove to represent themselves as on a footing not only of intimacy but of social equality with the author, to re-establish a sense of a coterie audience in the face of the realities of a mass heterogeneous reading public.

I. Lady Frances Shelley

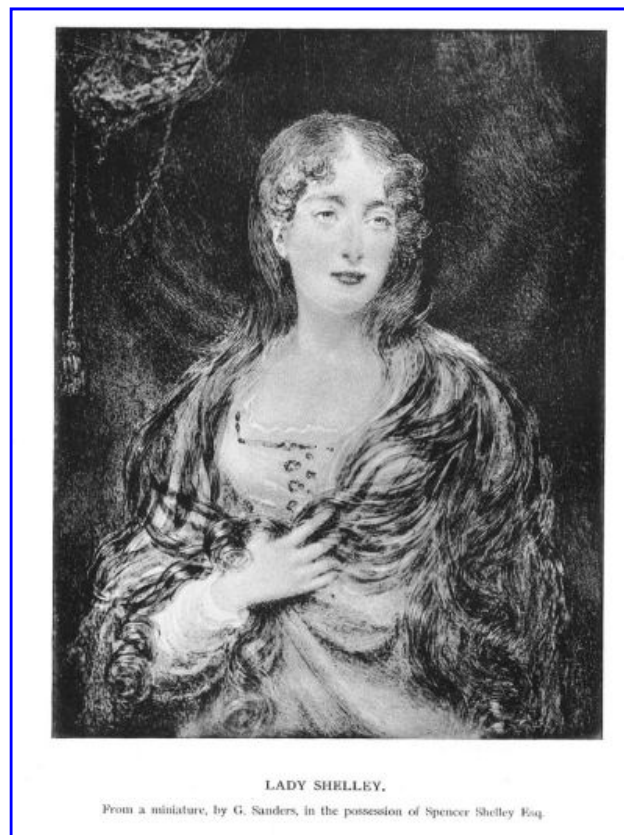


Figure 1: Lady Frances Shelley. Frontispiece, Edgcumbe (1912). Author's own collection.

6. For those unacquainted with her, Frances Shelley was born in 1787, the daughter of Thomas Winckley of Preston and connected through her mother to the Dalrymples. Against her family's advice, in 1807 she married Sir John Shelley, gamester, horse-fancier, and friend of the heir to the throne, with whom she seems to have been happy. She was thus a member of the upper ten thousand, with the entrée into the highest circles. A noted beauty, accomplished conversationalist, and an amateur musician with literary interests and connections (including her distant relative Percy Bysshe Shelley), she moved for the most part in high Tory circles. She was introduced to Lord Byron through his sister, became a longtime intimate and passionate hero-worshipper (indeed a fan) of the Duke of Wellington, and was socially prominent enough for Victoria to come to pay her respects on her deathbed in 1873. Courtesy of these connections, in July 1815 she made her way to the Continent in pursuit of a long-held ambition and arrived at Paris in the immediate aftermath of Waterloo, where she met, amongst many others, Sir Walter Scott. Like many others, including Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and their companions and hangers-on, she took the opportunity afforded by the cessation of war to travel to Italy via Geneva, her stay in the summer of 1816 coinciding with Byron's occupancy of the Villa Diodati in Cologny; her tour of the locality corresponded at many points with the excursions that Byron was making with the Shelleys

and Hobhouse to sites associated with Rousseau and others, which he wrote up in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage III*. In 1819 she made the tour of Scotland, and, meeting up again with Scott, was invited to stay at his show-home Abbotsford, then in the throes of alteration and extension. In 1834, she made another trip to the Continent, and repeated it for one last time in 1853. On these trips she made a series of excursions to sites associated with poets of an earlier age—most especially to locales associated with Ariosto, Petrarch and Tasso—which she seems to have understood in part as repetitions of literary pilgrimages earlier made by Byron and recorded in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage IV*. and in this, again, she was thoroughly conventional for her time. In the course of these travels, she therefore traversed a variety of sites associated with three of the four romantic figures — Rousseau, Scott, Byron, and Burns—who elicited the highest levels of romantic fandom and tourism.

II. On holiday with Rousseau, 1816

7. Driving along the margins of Lake Geneva on her way from Besançon to Neuchâtel in 1816, Frances Shelley's party passed through Môtiers-Travers. Môtiers-Travers was where Rousseau had spent some time living in retirement, where he received many visitors, including the young James Boswell, and from which he was, famously, driven out by the villagers in May 1765. In 1816, the house itself had shared that fame for some time, in large part because there were a number of important engravings in circulation which illustrated Rousseau's *Confessions* and represented his various houses, most particularly, the four volume publication by Jean-Benjamin de Laborde and Beat Fidel Zurlauben, *Tableaux topographiques, pittoresques, physiques, historiques, moraux, politiques, littéraires de la Suisse* (c. 1784), which included no fewer than four engravings relating to Rousseau's life in the village. (The publication in 1819 of de Last's and Lameau's *Vues de différentes habitations de J.J. Rousseau* would expand this canon.) Shelley's account makes it plain that she was aware both of the story and of the house. She notes that "we passed the house in which [Rousseau] had lived" (Edgcumbe 1: 219) and further remarks that "when we came to Motiers-Travers we longed to live there, and fully understood Rousseau's regret at being driven from it" (Edgcumbe 1: 219). Shelley's self-placing as Rousseau is brief but typical of the self-representation of contemporary tourists. Such pilgrims aspired both to "be" Rousseau and to join the select club of those who could boast a sufficiency of Rousseauistic sensibility. However, the locus classicus for this sort of self-identification with Rousseau was not Môtiers-Travers but the little Île St Pierre, located in the Lac de Bienne, where Rousseau had spent a few short but idyllic months writing his *Confessions* and collecting material for the *Rêveries d'un Promeneur Solitaire* before being forced to leave there, too, in October 1765.

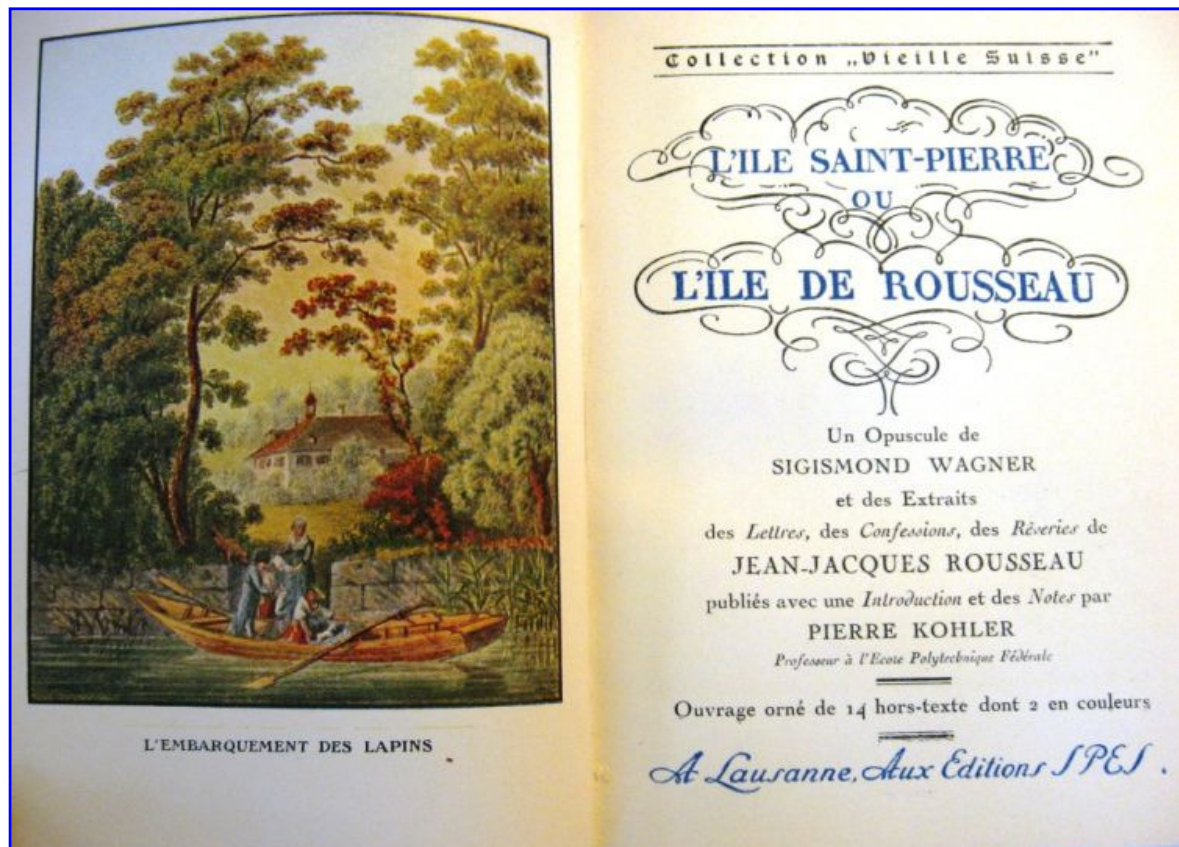


Figure 2: “Île St Pierre” from Wagner (1817). Author’s own collection.

8. The experience of visiting the Île St Pierre seems to have been particularly powerful for contemporaries—there is much more written about it than about any other Rousseau site—and looking at a few of the many visitors’ accounts extant allow us to get a flavour of the experience Rousseau’s many fans were seeking. Shelley’s own narrative of her visit may most usefully be understood in relation to the accounts of other contemporary visitors, who wrote about the experience at enthusiastic length. For example, Friedrich von Matthisson’s account of his trip to the Île, made some time between 1785 and 1794, makes plain the ways in which Rousseau’s autobiography powerfully mapped and narrated place for the tourist, allowing the recreational insertion of the reader-tourist’s body and sensibility within the author’s; Matthisson’s identification of the pleasures of reading “on the very spot” as a form of touristic “self-forgetfulness” as well as a self-amplification underscores how this reading practice was designed to meld reader and author together:

How deeply were we affected with reading this most interesting writer’s description of St Peter’s Island on the very spot. What a melancholy delight did we feel in following his footsteps from the room he inhabited, to the orchard, where, with his bag girt round him, he often gathered fruit in company with his honest domestics: then to the hills, the meads and the groves where first, with Linnaeus in his hands, he studies the distinction of the genus of plants, till we come to the very spot on the shore, where on a fine evening he

would stretch himself, contented and happy, with his eyes fixed on the flood, in the sweet calm of self-forgetfulness. (Matthisson 522)

Such representations of a ghostly figure of "Rousseau" as a double for the reader-tourist were common. So was the, at first glance, rather paradoxical construction of this experience as not simply one-to-one, but communal. The young German Friedrich Stolberg, for example, more explicitly describes a conversation with his friends on a very similar walk in 1791:

Here, said we, did the pensive Jean Jacques ruminate. On this steep height, and, glowing with all the delightful sweets of rectitude, he contemplated the clear waters of the lake. Here he did calm his ardent sensibility, by viewing the dewy plants, which he took so much pleasure to collect. Under this rock, reclining in a boat, he touched the soft flute. Yonder is the diminutive island, which he peopled with rabbits: that small spot, which, comparatively, makes the mother island a continent...

As we left the island, we were awakened by the recollection of what must have been the sensation of Rousseau, when he was obliged to leave this place of refuge... (Stolberg 1:142-3)

A third young man, Nikolai Karamzin, may serve as a final example, if only because he wrote at such length and performed these emotional evolutions so thoroughly. Visiting in 1790, he both simulates Rousseau by re-experiencing Rousseauistic emotions on the spot, and extends this to summoning a fanciful vision of the philosopher:

Not long ago I went to the island of St Pierre, where the greatest writer of the eighteenth century took refuge from the wickedness and intolerance of mankind, which, like the Furies, drove him from place to place. It was a beautiful day. Within a few hours I had wandered about the entire island, seeking everywhere traces of Geneva's citizen and philosopher, beneath the boughs of ancient beech and chestnut trees, in the beautiful walks of the dark forest, in the faded meadows and rocky prominences of the shore.

"Here" I thought, "here, forgetting cruel and ungrateful people— ungrateful and cruel! My God! How sad it is to feel and to write!—here, forgetting all worldly tumult, he enjoyed the tranquil evening of life in solitude. Here his soul rested from its mighty labours. Here he found peace in quiet and sweet repose! Where is he? Everything remains as it was, but he is gone —gone!"

Now I thought I heard the forest and meadow sigh, or were they only repeating the deep sigh of my heart? I glanced about me. The entire island seemed in mourning...I sat down upon the shore...My fancy imagined a boat gliding over the placid waters, moved by a gentle breeze which guided it in place of a helmsman. In the boat lay [the aged Rousseau,] a venerable old man in Armenian dress; his eyes, fixed on heaven, reflected a noble soul, depth of thought, and pensiveness. (Karamzin 162-3)

Karamzin's experience is wholeheartedly sentimental and pleasingly typical in its final fanciful summoning of Rousseau to inhabit the emptiness of the island in his daydream. The thoroughly paradoxical quality of this Rousseauistic tourist experience as at once empty, solitary, alienated, private, and "of the heart," while nonetheless full, communal, performative, cosmopolitan, and print-based, is epitomised in Karamzin's anecdote of his encounter with an equally young Englishman:

As I sat meditating, I suddenly saw a young man, with a round hat pulled down over his eyes, approaching me with unhurried steps. In his right hand he was carrying a book. He stopped, looked at me, and said, "*Vous pensez à lui.*" Then he walked away with the same unhurried steps. (163)

This moment when the solitary fan turns out to have company, and company of a congenial kind, demonstrates the way that this sort of fandom is imagined as ambiguously intimate *and* communal, original *and* derivative.

9. The presence of others was in practice essential to the experience, because it described an exclusive club of admirers. This club was most vividly evidenced in the habit (prevalent before the institution of a visitors' book) of writing lengthy inscriptions on the walls of the pavilion and of Rousseau's bedroom. This practice of inscription on literary sites was widespread at the time; the sentimental graffiti on the Île St Pierre are especially well-documented and it is clear that Rousseau inspired a particular mode of verse-inscription which was designed to perform an intimate identification between author and reader to other readers. [7] Such verses universally describe a romantic privacy of physical encounter. The privacy was manifestly a fiction —not only were the inscriptions there intended for all to see who cared to look, but travellers' accounts and later, guidebooks, often quoted them at length. Madame de Gauthier, for instance, who was sufficiently taken with the experience to visit the island not once but twice in 1790, transcribed many, waspishly calling them

tristes éloges, dont la plupart sont dépourvues de rime et de raison, et presque toujours des premiers principes de la prosodie française; car Suisses, Anglois, Allemands, tous y riment en notre langue...(Gauthier 2:388)

[sorry elegies, most of which are void of rhyme or reason, and nearly always of the basics of French prosody, because the Swiss, the English, the Germans all poet it here in our language...]

Sigismond Wagner's guidebook, first published in 1798, reinforces this convention. Wagner had acted as guide to the island for a number of years, before writing it, so it is reasonable to assume that it embodies the tourist experience that was being delivered at the time. He describes "*une foule de noms et d'inscriptions, dont les murs de la rotunde sont couverts au-dedans et au-dehors*", which, he says, "*attestent la vive impressions que ce lieu produit sur*

tous ceux qui viennent le visiter" (Wagner 15) ["a mass of signatures and inscriptions, with which the walls of the rotunda are covered above and below...attest to the vivid impression which this place produces on all who come to visit it"]. He dwells upon the inscriptions both in the pavilion and the bedroom as evidence of the sheer volume of Rousseauistic experience supplied by the island to readers of many nationalities, but he also spends time listing the eminent names amongst these graffiti, including Pitt the Younger, Immanuel Kant, the Empresses Josephine and Marie-Louise, and Napoleon himself. Those inscriptions he chooses to transcribe are striking in their insistence upon tourism as romantic substitution and encounter, replicating and pre-scripting the experiences already noted above as occurring in travel-writing. The first reads:

*Heureux quand je pouvois, maître de mon plaisirs,
Disposant à mon gré de mes plus doux loisirs,
Dans ces bois enchantés errer l'aventure;
Tantôt m'y reposer sur un banc de gazon
Tantôt sans ce salon, entouré de verdure,
Respirer a moi seul une atmosphere pure,
Et m'y livrer à la reflexion;
Y renouveler la lecture
De Rousseau, mon cher compagnon,
Y rentrer, sur ses pas, au sein de la nature,
Et là, loin des cités, loin de toute imposture,
Être avec elle à l'unisson.*

(Wagner 15)

[Happy when I can, master of my pleasures/Dispose at my own will my sweet leisures/In these enchanted woods wander at random/Sometimes lie upon a grassy bank/Sometimes in this room, surrounded by greenery/Breathe the pure air in solitude/And give myself up to reflection;/Here renew my reading of Rousseau, my dear companion,/Here enter, in his footsteps, into the bosom of nature/And there, far from cities, far from all hypocrisy/Be at one with her.]

This act of reading Rousseau in his favourite haunts is amplified into a conversation with Rousseau's ghost in the other inscription Wagner transcribes:

*Un soir, au clair de lune, errant dans ce bocage,
J'y trouvai de Rousseau l'ombre morne et sauvage;
Que veux-tu? me dit-il, en détournement les yeux.
Ainsi que vous, mon maître, admirer ces beaux lieux.
Tu fais bien, tout est beau, dit-il, dans la nature,
Hors l'homme, qui la défigure.*

(Wagner 15)

[One evening, wandering in this wood by moonlight/I met the wild and mournful shade of Rousseau;/ "What is it that you want?" he said, turning his eyes on me./ "The same as you, master, to admire these beautiful places."/ "You do right, all is beautiful," said he, "in nature,/Except man, who disfigures it."]

As if to underscore how mainstream this is, Wagner's prose fantasy reiterates the fancy:

Cette île, qu'il a rendue si célèbre, n'offre point d'objet qui ne soit empreint de son souvenir; mais c'est surtout ici..., c'est dans les ombres et fraîches retraites de ce bois, que l'on croit sentir sa présence, et qu'à chaque rayon douteux qui perce l'obscurité du feuillage, à chaque soufflé de vent qui frémit dans les cimes des arbres, l'imagination frappé cède aux superstitions de l'enfance, et croit voir l'ombre de Rousseau errer encore dans les lieux qui lui furent jadis si chers.(Wagner 17)

[This island, which he has made so famous, offers nothing that is not imprinted with his memory; but it is above all here..., it is in the shadows and fresh retreats of the woods, that one feels his presence, and with each doubtful ray which pierces the leafy obscurity, each whisper of wind which shakes the tops of the trees, the struck imagination gives way to childish superstition, and believes it sees the ghost of Rousseau wandering once again in the places which were once so dear to him.]

Wagner's book thus reiterates the inscriptions' performance; it is not coincidental that the third edition of 1817 was amplified with extracts from Rousseau and with hand-coloured plates and sold as a commemorative album to visitors to the island, who thus received certification of having joined the club of Rousseau fans.

10. Shelley herself made the trip on July 15 1816, a day characteristic of the awful weather of the summer of 1816. Her diary spends an unusually long time describing the locale:

Rousseau's room is merely four bare walls, with a stove in it. The house is very large, and stands alone on the island...In the centre there is a court, with open arcades on three sides of it. In the middle of the court flourishes a large lime tree, which casts its shade over the whole space. On the back of the court there is a wood, in which stands a small pavilion surrounded by grass, with oaks and beeches close at hand. In spite of the rain, we visited this spot. Alas! Our imagination was forced to supply the brilliant sunshine which would have enhanced its beauties. (Edgcumbe 1: 222)

The torrential rain rendered the whole experience downright "unsentimental":

As we were determined to be gay in spite of the weather we amused ourselves by talking bad German to the peasants, and very unsentimentally ate bread and cheese, where

Rousseau had lived and dreamed, and where he had, for a short time, enjoyed that idyllic existence which he loved. We returned, wet through... (Edgcumbe 1:223)

Shelley's playfulness about the failure of sentiment on this occasion nonetheless stands as a pointer to the experience that the Île St Pierre was supposed to promise, a sentimental location and recapitulation of Rousseau's emotions and "idyllic existence," conceived as a social performance to the like-minded.

III. Scott At Home, 1819

11. Rousseau's ghostliness was both convenient and inconvenient to fandom. It was convenient in the sense that there was no obstacle in the shape of the living celebrity to the tourist-experiment of "being" Rousseau. Indeed, Rousseau's ghost could be ventriloquised to approve of the romantic sensibility that these writers variously set out to inhabit and display, whether in handwritten inscriptions, in their letters and travel diaries, or through a full-blown print guidebook. It was inconvenient in the sense that, unlike a living celebrity, he could not be viewed and pursued in person. Death was not yet a drawback in the cases of Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron, the leading poetic celebrities of the age. Shelley's interest in both of these figures provides evidence of other possible modes and practices of fandom.

12. In July 1819, Shelley renewed her hitherto slight acquaintance with the Minstrel of the North, and was subsequently invited to pay a visit to the literary lion's show-home, Abbotsford, still under construction. Scott acted as her guide over Melrose Abbey, famous in itself, but also as the setting for part of his best-selling poem *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), and he also drove her over to Dryburgh Abbey, another favourite Gothic ruin (where he would eventually be buried). A few days were spent at Abbotsford, admiring the house, its curiosities, and the anecdotal and complimentary conversation of its owner, before leaving for Edinburgh.



Figure 3: Abbotsford (J. Bower, 1835). Author's own collection.

Her diary records three remarks of note with regard to Scott. The first, made in August 1815 at Paris when they first found themselves in each other's company at a picnic, endeavours with only moderate success to collate the poet with his poetry—an exercise in making romantic authorship in a way already possible around the Byron of *The Corsair*: disappointed in his appearance ("not prepossessing...a club-foot, white eyelashes, and a clumsy figure. He has no expression when his face is in repose" Edgcumbe 1:139), she was more taken with his talk, because it was more poetic: "His conversation reminds me of his poems—the same ideas and images recurring—and often the same careless manner of expressing them" (Edgcumbe 1:139). The second, made during her visit to the North, is a comment that the Border landscape owed all its charms to Scott's powers of description, and that it was in danger of being in itself anti-climactic:

There is not a spot mentioned by this romantic poet which does not owe its renown for beauty and charm to the exquisite description of it, as seen through his magic glass. As in a highly skilled miniature every blemish of complexion vanished without destroying the likeness, so is it with Scott's descriptions. Although they are accurate, the poet heightens every beauty and conceals every defect. (Edgcumbe 2:43)

This sense of viewing a visually uninteresting landscape made romantic purely by superimposed literary association was not confined to Lady Shelley; Washington Irving,

visiting three years earlier, and undergoing much the same routine of guided visits, seems equally to have experienced the same initial disappointment in the landscape:

I gazed about me with mute surprise, I may almost say, with disappointment. I beheld a mere succession of grey waving hills, line beyond line, as far as my eye could reach, monotonous in their aspect, and so destitute of trees, that one could almost see a stout fly walking along their profile; and the far-famed Tweed appeared a naked stream, flowing between bare hills, without a tree or a thicket on its banks; and yet, such had been the magic web of poetry and romance thrown over the whole, that it had a greater charm for me than the richest scenery...(Irving 17)

The third remark of note that Shelley makes amplifies this sense of Scott's "magic", but characterises it rather less generously as the reader's power to conjure up from the landscape, and Edinburgh in particular, fictional characters drawn from Scott's oeuvre: "The Castle, Arthur's Seat, and Salisbury Crag, conjured up fairy visions of historic, classic, and poetic interest, all equally absorbing. As in a vision, I saw one form succeeding another—the unfortunate Mary, the poetic Marmion, and the fascinating Effie Deans" (Edgcumbe 2:54).

13. Taken together, Shelley's remarks suggest some of the resistance that the figure of Scott put up to the early culture of romantic fandom. Unlike Byron, although famous and sought after, he was not personally exciting to the fan, and he offered none of the extremer emotional pleasures of "being" the author that Rousseau had and that Lord Byron would.

[8] His poetry and fictions, on the other hand, certainly inspired admiration, but the tourist-practices associated with them seem calculated as much to describe the reader's imaginative flair as the writer's. Where they discuss Scott's "magic powers", both Washington Irving and Shelley verge on charging him with fraud, promising the reader-tourist rather more than actuality can deliver. Shelley's thank-you letter to Scott makes this explicit:

I hope that you will allow me to take advantage of this opportunity to express the very great pleasure which we have derived from our tour in Scotland. That pleasure is in a great measure due to the romantic interest given to every mountain and glen that you have mentioned, either in verse, in conversation, or in prose. To speak the truth, those parts of Scotland which have not been celebrated in song have but small attraction for me...In the neighbourhood of Abbotsford, as seen through your magic glass, I wished to have been born in some Highland glen before the '45...But I must confess to you that the scenery of Scotland is, in general, too tame to satisfy my taste for romantic grandeur... (Edgcumbe 2:62)

Shelley's compliment to Scott is double-edged—on the one hand, she thanks him for giving "romantic interest" to the landscape; on the other, she suggests that she has a more romantic taste in scenery than he must have, preferring the genuinely sublime to the poetically exaggerated. This slight condescension reverberates too in her estimate of the social pretensions of Abbotsford ("[it] has the appearance of a castle built of pastry—

something like those we see on a supper table. But one must not quiz the castle or criticise the whims of such a genius" (Edgcumbe 2:46). And it colours her account of one mildly flirtatious exchange:

Scott paid me a very pretty compliment upon my riding at Paris...[He] remarked that no-one could ride so well as I did...He concluded with these words: "I am quite sure that the author of the Scottish novels must have seen Lady Shelley ride, ere he described Die [sic] Vernon." (Edgcumbe 2:48)

Scott here offers Shelley the chance to occupy the position of the originator of fiction, something that she is very ready to do, as her sense that it is she who conjures up "fairy visions" from the landscape as a reader also suggests. Scott's well-documented vanishing-act in the games he played with anonymity as "the Author of Waverley" is here played out in miniature, and suggests some of the ways that, as a narrative poet and fiction-writer, he could be written out of romantic authorship by the romantic reader, and so disqualified as an object of fandom.

IV. Running after Byron, 1834

14. In December 1813, when she first met him, Shelley was decidedly not one of Byron's many fans. She recorded her first verdict on the poet then working on *The Corsair* thus: "He is decidedly handsome, and can be very agreeable. He seems to be easily put out by trifles, and, at times, looks terribly savage" (Edgcumbe 1:52). (She did him the justice, however, of saying that he had been very patient with his young nephews and nieces). Accompanying Augusta Leigh to pay a formal visit to Lady Byron and her new husband on the occasion of their marriage in April 1815, she had a very uncomfortable time of it, offering congratulations that were coldly received by Byron with a "demoniacal" expression, and summing up her experience by remarking that "I felt like a young person who has inadvertently dipped her finger into boiling water" (81, 82). She coincided with the poet again in Lady Dalrymple Hamilton's salon in Geneva in 1816, after he had left England in the wake of the scandal of his separation from his wife, and expressed much the same views in much the same language, amplified with incredulity at the fan phenomenon that surrounded him at the time:

Lord Byron looked in for a moment, but on seeing so many people he went away without speaking to anyone. He was evidently very much put out by something; and the expression on his face was somewhat demoniacal. What a strange person! They say he will have nothing to say to the crowds of English who almost dog his footsteps. (236)

Given this pronounced distaste for the person of Byron, it is all the more striking that following his death (an occasion marked for her by Sir Humphrey Davy inscribing verses "On the Death of Lord Byron" in her album [2:123]), she would become a completely conventional Byron fan; once his living and embarrassing social person was out of the way, it

seems, her acquaintance with this celebrity at last became desirable. It is well-documented that post-Napoleonic travellers on the Continent would come to see the landscape through which they passed through Byron's eyes and to ape his emotional stances courtesy of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage III* and *IV*. which would eventually be conveniently extracted into Murray's guidebooks (Buzard 125-30). Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges, for example, noted in the same year that Shelley would set off on her travels again, 1834, that "[Byron's] spirit always haunts me on the lake of Geneva; and I behold him forever floating on its waves in all the shadowy brilliance of his imaginations...[I] behold him at Venice, at Ravenna, at Ferrara, at Florence, at Rome, and at Pisa; and I see him enter the soul of Dante, to wander with him in his exile among the sombre woods" (Brydges 256-7). This effect was very strong in relation to literary sites, partly because one of the projects of *Childe Harold* could be said to be to provide Byron with the chance to strike canonical fan postures at European writers' houses and haunts, thus inserting him within a cosmopolitan classical poetic tradition. Recapitulating Byron's tourist itinerary, tourists therefore engaged in the exercise of "being" Byron not so much as an author (as with Rousseau), but as a prototypical romantic fan.

15. Shelley's visit to the continent is accordingly marked by a tendency to refer her sightseeing experiences to those represented as Byron's in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage IV*. Describing her visit to Ariosto's house, she frames the experience in terms of Byron's literary celebrity and fandom:

In Ariosto's house I visited the room in which he was born and in which he died. It was here that he wrote in winter. In summer-time he sat on a bench in the garden, with a candle beside him after dark. Everything remains exactly as it was in his time. The garden is about thirty feet square; thus confirming what I have often observed—since the days when Byron wrote "The Corsair" in his sister's small cottage on Newmarket Heath— that real creative genius is not dependent on its environments, and that a poet's fancy is often more brilliant when the mind is not distracted by exterior objects... The people here tell us that Lord Byron shut himself up for a whole day in this damp place! He has cut his name on the stone outside. The names of Samuel Rogers, Hobhouse, and Casimir de la Vigne, prove that this much ridiculed custom is, after all, natural to the whole human race. Following the example of others, my son Frederick added the name of Shelley. This may in future be mistaken for the name of my young kinsman, Percy Bysshe, by future pilgrims to this shrine... (Edgcumbe 2:234)

This meditation on the nature of fandom is wonderfully snobbish in its implicit argument that if the aristocratic Byron and other celebrities can practise fan inscription, then it will be all right for her son to do so, especially since he is the kinsman of a literary celebrity himself. (It is, however, noticeable that she excludes herself from this practice of inscription; though it would become much more common later in the century for women to compose tribute poetry and album verses, they seem rarely to have found it socially possible to cut graffiti).



Figure 4: Petrarch's house at Arquà. From the author's own collection.

16. Nor is this the sole example of Shelley's appeal to the Byronic to license her fandom. When she visits Petrarch's house at Arquà, she is equally aware of Byron's previous visit, recorded in *Childe Harold IV*. and goes out of her way to look for its physical traces:

Petrarch's home has been so accurately and so beautifully described by Byron, that I fully expected to find his name among those who have visited this romantic spot; but there was no trace of it. (2:238)

On this occasion, she is obliged to make do with a different celebrity-fan as a model in his place: "Alfieri has written a sonnet on the wall, but it has been scribbled over and much damaged. It is now protected by a glass frame" (2:238). Venice is not only suffused for her with Byron, whom she reads on the spot ("Every spot is vivified by the author of "Childe Harold," and is reminiscent of his tragedies" [2:241]), but is also authoritatively signed by Byron, something she records with some satisfaction: "We saw the 'Bridge of Sighs,' which is now no longer open to the public. Byron, according to his usual practice, has inscribed his name here" (2:243). Running through these scattered remarks is a recurring sense of privilege—in this case, the satisfaction with which she records that this signature of Byron's is not available to the general public. It reiterates that sense of being in a distinguished fan club that I've already noted as operating in the case of Rousseau, with the twist that its

exclusivity is here not merely a matter of exhibiting enough fine feeling but having the social clout to gain access to closed sites.

17. For Shelley, the traces of Byron's pilgrimage as a celebrity fan legitimate her own practice of literary tourism and associated practices of fandom; equally, the stories retailed in *Childe Harold* and Byron's tragedies help her to experience these locales as vivid and colourful. This latter effect, sadly, was not proof against time and grief over Wellington's death. One last snapshot gives us Lady Frances Shelley in August 1853 trying to access the same reading experience while travelling along the Rhine:

I read the third canto of "Childe Harold" on the scene itself, but the romance had faded, and I sadly wanted "the hand to clasp in mine!"

Alas! I now see things as they are, and not as they used to be when I cast around them a halo of historical and legendary romance. Every castle and every rock has been so often described, that the subject is worn threadbare. (2:321)

Shelley herself does not attribute this failure of romance primarily to age and sorrow, but to the wear and tear of cliché —the subject has become too common, the genre too well-used, perhaps the landscape had become too well-used as well. Writing and travelling in 1853, the age of the railway, mass leisure travel, and Murray's guidebooks, was another thing to writing and travelling in the age of the carriage.

V. Loch Katrine Unvisited, 1819

18. Shelley's sense of cliché may also have been one reason for her surprising failure to visit one famous literary locale, Loch Katrine and the Trossachs, the celebrated setting of Scott's poem *The Lady of the Lake* (1810). After her visit to Abbotsford in 1819, Shelley travelled on up into the Highlands. One of the standard destinations of the time would have been the Trossachs and Loch Katrine, and these were not much out of her route. Popular as a beauty spot even before 1810, largely because this wooded gorge was so uncharacteristic of the surrounding bare Highland scenery, with the publication of Scott's poem it was flooded with enthusiastic tourists.



Figure 5: "Ellen's Isle, Loch Katrine" by Henry B. Wimbush. Postcard c. 1905. Author's own collection.

Two satirical accounts of visiting the Trossachs throw a sidelight on Shelley's decision not to visit Loch Katrine. The first is by James Hogg, a friend and critic of Scott, who published a long, sardonic, and fictional account of the experience of visiting Loch Katrine entitled "Malise's Journey to the Trossacks" in the periodical *The Spy* for 1811. "Malise" is represented discussing his projected journey with an old Highlander:

He said, I was right to do so, else I would not be in the fashion, but it was a sign, I was too idle, and had very little to do at home; but that a Mr Scott had put all the people mad by printing a *lying poem*, about a man that never existed... (Bohls & Duncan 178)

If the Highlander is meant to represent an abrasively common-sense, lower-class view of this particular leisure pastime, Malise himself represents the class aspirations typical of the literary tourist. Hogg makes him Rousseauist in language and stance, but, comically, as not quite fully inhabiting either:

I wished to lose myself in the Trossachs alone; to have no interruption in my contemplations; but to converse only with nature, please myself with wondering at her wildest picture, and wonder why I was pleased. (179)

Malise records his enjoyment of the experience, but this enjoyment is represented not so

much as the result of his refined reading sensibility as of a little fine whisky; concluding his account, he provides this advice to any who would follow in his footsteps:

Whoever goes to survey the Trossachs, let him have the 11th, 12th and 13th division of the first canto of *The Lady of the Lake* in his heart; a little Highland whisky in his head; and then he shall see the most wonderful scene that nature ever produced. (179-180)

Hogg's suggestion that the performance of Rousseauistic sensibility is class-bound is not uncommon in itself; usually, however, accounts of these displays of literary sensibility are more sympathetic exactly because they are supposed to define and describe class membership. A complementary account of class and reading-practices informs, for example, the remarks of John MacCulloch—another sophisticated, not to say a jaundiced, reader of his friend Scott—who has much to say on the ways in which the landscape of Loch Katrine was being read in the immediate aftermath of the poem's success. In his letters to Scott detailing his journeys across Scotland between 1811 and 1820 he displays considerable class animus in complaining fretfully about the crowds newly infesting the Trossachs—"barouches and gigs, cocknies and fishermen and poets, Glasgow weavers and travelling haberdashers" (MacCulloch 194), expressing especial annoyance at the Londoner who arrived with a French horn so as to make the most of the echoes made famous by Fitz-James' horn-call. Typical of this flush of tourists and their practices was the young actor William Charles Macready, who took a three week holiday after giving performances in Glasgow in the summer of 1818, walking to Loch Katrine, "the object of my most ardent wishes", specifically for the pleasure of rowing "merrily up the lake, visiting the island, the Goblin's Cave, and every spot that Scott's poetry has invested with a never-dying interest" (Macready 1:182, 183, 187). MacCulloch speculates sourly on the nature of the "never-dying interest" with which the poem inspired such tourists: "Why the scenes of a fictitious tale should excite the same interest as those where the great drama of life has been acted in its various forms, I shall leave you to explain...but I am quite sure that many of the well-informed personages who come here to see, believe the whole thing" (MacCulloch 1:193). MacCulloch's lack of enthusiasm for this down-market literalism informs his slightly vindictive pleasure in retailing the discomfiture of a too-credulous reader whom he had accompanied in a search for the Goblin's Cave, Ellen's second place of refuge: "I had accompanied, on one occasion, a cockney friend whom I met here, and who, after scrambling among the rocks and bogs for an hour, expressed vast indignation when he had reached the Coir nan Uriskin. 'Lord, sir,' said the [guide], 'there is no cave here but what Mr Scott made himself.' 'What the d—I, no cave?' 'Na, Sir, but we go where the gentry chooses, and they always ask for the goblin cave first'" (1:165). MacCulloch's self-distancing from these tourists as middle-class, urban, ignorant, and literalist only echoes in another register and from a different class perspective Hogg's Highlander's sardonic account of how in order to enhance the tourist experience there was to be a girl impersonating the lady of the lake and a man hired to represent the Goblin himself (Bohls and Duncan 178).

19. Shelley herself made no comment upon the phenomenon of Loch Katrine, so one is left to speculate on whether this passion for the scenes of fiction, unsecured by the presence of the author, imagined or physical, as tour-guide, was either too unsophisticated or too popular an experience to seek out in 1819. It is conceivable that it was both. It may well have been the case that there was something of a hierarchy between the two modes of literary fandom. The one, author-centred and organised towards visiting, being or envisioning the author, encoded the social equality and literary clubbability of the reader; the other, equally well-established in the period, fiction-centred and organised towards being a spectator of narrative, connoted a propensity to confuse the real and the fictional, a dangerous and risible lack of sophistication which contemporary discourse typically associated with the new mass readership. Between seeing a vision of Rousseau, and believing in a girl impersonating the Lady of the Lake, lay a rather thin, but acutely class-conscious line between active fancy and sensation-seeking, one that persists to this day in the distinction between visiting Austen's Chawton and Dickens' World.

20. Over the course of a lifetime, Shelley thus experimented with a variety of forms of literary tourism and fandom. She visited both the living and the dead, seeing their landscapes through their eyes and under their signatures. On balance, she adopts an author-centred model of fandom, despite her early flirtation with seeing Scott's environs through a visionary haze of Scott's characters. Her sense that sites could be worn threadbare by over-use suggests some of the reasons that literary tourism evolved as a mode of fandom in the period, because what comes through most clearly in Shelley's diaries and letters is the sense of an anxiety of readership which fuels literary tourism. To indulge in literary tourism was a class-marker, for in the early nineteenth century only a few had the luxuries of sufficient education, idleness and wealth to go in the footsteps of their favourite authors to any of the places I've been discussing in this paper. As such, the practice served, or was supposed to serve, to distinguish the elite tourist-reader from an otherwise worryingly large and undifferentiated mass readership. If romantic authors appealed to posterity in order to save themselves from contemporary mass audiences, romantic readers turned tourist in order to distinguish themselves from the same mass-audience. Their self-representation as literary tourists was designed to distinguish their practice of sophisticated re-reading and re-representation from the mere unthinking consumption associated with mass culture. Our own time, in which it is those readers who *do* write their names in the visitors' books of writers' houses who are regarded as unsophisticated, was still undreamed of.

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Notes

[1] Scholarship of what we might broadly consider "literary" fandom has hitherto largely concentrated on modern popular cultural artefacts rather than the consumption of celebrity

authors, perhaps because with a couple of notable exceptions such as J.K. Rowling, authors are not today's super-celebrities. Fandom has largely been discussed in relation to such disparate genres and cult phenomena as Hollywood film, soap opera, science fiction, *Star Trek*, *The Lord of the Rings*, Harry Potter and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Fan magazines, fictions, canons, discourse, identities, communities, and practices have been written about from a variety of perspectives ranging from the psychological to reader response. [BACK](#)

[2] For an influential study of Scott's anxiety of authorship, for example, see Ferris. [BACK](#)

[3] For studies of Byronic celebrity see, for example, Watson *Transfiguring*; Wilson; Mole. [BACK](#)

[4] For John Clare's relation to Byronic celebrity, see, for example, Martin, Goldsmith; for Lamb see Watson, Soderholm; for Wilson see Watson. [BACK](#)

[5] *New York Times* Sunday, August 12, 1912. [BACK](#)

[6] Particularly pertinent to my argument here is Robert Darnton's essay *Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity* which explored the possibility of constructing a history of a new romantic reading experience through a case-study of one reader of Rousseau. Others have also described emergent modes of reading in the period. Altick looked at the emergence of a mass reading public; Sutherland early surveyed the reading-boom; Lynch argues that the trope of reading and re-reading in the contemporaneous novel is evidence that reading became a technique of romantic identity-production, noting "a new insistence on distinguishing between styles of reading and on propagating the decorums that separate one reader's refined receptiveness to literary meanings from another, vulgar reader's avid following of fashion" (127), an insistence that, as I shall be arguing below, characterises the contemporary discourse of literary tourism as well. [BACK](#)

[7] For a discussion of the practice of inscription and associated practices at writers' graves as acts of readerly aggression, which makes a suggestive companion-piece to the practice I'm describing here, see Matthews. [BACK](#)

[8] McDayter notes in passing that Scott did not elicit the sort of fandom that Byron did, and attributes this to the fact that his "role in cultural production never challenged the fragile lines which had been drawn between the literary and the real" (60n.). Although this explanation is open to question because of Scott's re-description of history as fiction, it is undoubtedly the case that Scott did not produce in his readers quite what moderns would describe as fandom. [BACK](#)